RESOURCE GUIDE

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EDUCATION ABOUT RELIGION IN ONTARIO PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

1994

Ontario Ministry of Education and Training

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Preface

This resource guide is intended to assist boards of education in developing programs in education about religion for public elementary school students. It will also be of use to boards that are considering whether to provide such programs. Individual boards or groups of boards that choose to work together will find the document helpful in designing programs about religion that will be consistent with government policy, appropriate to the needs of their local communities, and relevant within the context of both Ontario society and the global community. The emphasis is on enabling boards to design their own programs based on ministry policy and philosophy. This document, therefore, makes general rather than specific recommendations regarding, for example, program development and implementation and teacher education.

This document will also be helpful to principals, teachers, and parents who are involved in designing programs in education about religion that are consistent with ministry policy and that meet the needs and reflect the wishes of their communities.

PART A

Introduction

HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN ONTARIO SCHOOLS

The study of religion in Ontario public schools has evolved to include the study of ideas and practices of a variety of religious traditions. The population of Ontario today includes significant numbers of people from diverse racial, ethnocultural, and religious backgrounds, and Ontario public schools seek to foster respect for and understanding of different cultures, including their forms of religious expression.

When the founding peoples came to Canada from Europe, they brought with them the long-standing tradition of conducting education under the auspices of Christian churches. Schools and universities in Europe were traditionally established and directed by clergy. An important objective of most of the founding religious groups in Canada was to instruct students in the tenets of their particular denomination.

In 1620, the Recollets missionaries in the tiny colony of Quebec established a school for Native children. The Jesuits soon followed, and founded the Collège du Québec in 1635. Other Catholic religious orders established deep roots in the colony, and church responsibility for and control over education was maintained and strengthened. Religion thus had a pervasive influence on French Canada from its beginnings in the seventeenth century. In English Canada, beginning in the eighteenth century, the Anglican Church established schools, and various Protestant denominations, such as Methodist, Presbyterian, and

Baptist, followed suit. The subsequent development of universities in English and French Canada can be attributed to the influence of the churches – Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant. The objective of preparing individuals for the professions, including the ministry, continued to exist within a faith-nurturing context.

Education in Ontario, both public and private, therefore, had a religious dimension from the beginning. The first elementary school in Ontario was French and Catholic, and was founded in 1786 in the parish of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary at what eventually became Windsor. Shortly afterwards, the Anglican clergy founded several English-language schools. The spread of settlement in Upper Canada brought an increase in the number of private schools, both English and French, and a corresponding increase in government interest in education. In 1807, the government passed an act authorizing the establishment of publicly funded schools in Upper Canada. By the mid-1840s, a series of school acts had created two parallel systems of schools. The public school system consisted of non-denominational schools that were open to children of all faiths and that had a mandate to include moral education and non-denominational religious education in the curriculum.[1] The separate school system consisted of schools that had a mandate to serve the children of one particular faith. All these schools were Christian. Students in the public school system were for the most part Anglican and Protestant, while students in the separate school system were mostly Roman Catholic. The beliefs of the very few students of other traditions, including Native spiritual traditions, were virtually ignored in the curriculum.

It was generally felt that schools had a responsibility for the moral education of students and that moral education should be based on Christian teaching. The teaching of religion in the public school system was governed by legislation that covered both devotional exercises (prayer and Bible readings) and religious instruction (the teaching of religious and moral doctrine). In 1816, the Common School Act, which provided for government-supported schools, called for regular devotional exercises and regular periods of religious instruction for students. Immediately following the introduction of this legislation, objections were raised in some quarters that the devotional exercises and religious instruction provided in the schools were denominational and, therefore, constituted a limitation on religious freedom.

It was not until the mid-1820s, however, with the emergence of the voluntarist movement under Egerton Ryerson, that the importance of providing Christian teaching that was not tied to the doctrine of a particular church began to be emphasized. A further issue arising out of this new emphasis was the difficulty of ensuring that religious instruction in the public schools would be genuinely non-denominational.

The School Act of 1843 stated that students could receive the religious instruction desired by their parents or guardians and that students could be exempt from devotional exercises and religious instruction to which their parents or guardians objected.

The 1846 School Act devised by Egerton Ryerson provided for public education that was non-denominational but based on the Bible and the notion of a common Christianity. The act also recommended that school trustees, rather than the education department, be responsible for the way in which religious instruction was introduced and maintained in the schools; government involvement was to be restricted to the role of supplying facilities. These provisions began the tradition of local

1. At that time, education that was not associated with a particular Christian denomination or sect, but was based generally on Christian principles, was regarded as non-denominational or non-sectarian.

autonomy over the content of religious instruction in the schools that continued until 1944.

Throughout the nineteenth century, legislation continued to uphold the primacy of non-denominational Christian teaching as the basis for moral education and religious instruction in the public schools. The School Act of 1850 specified that a teacher should be "a person of Christian sentiment", and the 1855 act stated that each school should begin and end the school day with prayer and Bible reading. The Lord's Prayer was to be part of the daily opening exercises, and the Ten Commandments were to be taught to all students and repeated once a week. In 1859, provision was made for clergy to teach the students of their church in the school, although usually outside regular school hours by an extension of the school day. The right of students to be exempt from religious instruction at the parents' or guardians' request was also continued.

The decades after 1900 saw periodic movements in favour of strengthening the role of religious instruction in the schools. These movements generally occurred in response to a perceived relaxation of moral standards in society, for example, after the First World War and during the Second World War.

In 1944, in response to one such movement, the Ontario regulation governing education (Regulation 13 at that time) was amended to make religious instruction part of the regular curriculum, and made classroom teachers responsible for giving it. Two half-hour periods a week were to be allotted to religious instruction, and the content was to be based on a study of the Bible. Local clergy could be invited to give the instruction, at the board's discretion. The course in each grade was based on a series of revised Teachers' Guides to Religious Education authorized by the Minister of Education for use in Ontario public schools. Various types of exemption were allowed: in response to the wishes of its local community, a board could ask to be excused from the requirement to provide religious instruction; individual teachers and students could also request exemption.

In the twenty-five years following implementation, however, there were increasing numbers of objections that the religious instruction provided had a denominational bias that was inappropriate in schools open to all. The difficulty of "teaching religion" also gave cause for concern and contributed to a slow decline in the number of boards and schools offering religious instruction, with or without official exemption.

In the early 1960s, a debate emerged between those seeking a strengthening of the religious-instruction component and those seeking its complete removal from the curriculum. The former group saw renewed emphasis on religious instruction as a way of maintaining traditional moral standards. The latter group felt that societal changes caused by greatly increased diversity in Ontario required increasing secularization. Reliance on exemptions for individual students was regarded as an inadequate way of dealing with diversity, because students could be harmed psychologically and emotionally by having to be exempted.

In 1966, in response to these pressures, the government appointed a commission headed by the Honourable Keiller Mackay to inquire into the state of religious education in schools and to clarify the responsibilities of schools in this area.[2] The commission's recommendations included withdrawing the provisions in the regulation for two half-hours a week of religious education in the elementary schools, and for the optional teaching of religion by clergy in the secondary schools for up to one period a week per class. It was recommended that opening exercises should consist

2. J. Keiller Mackay, Chair, *Religious Information and Moral Development: The Report of the Committee on Religious Education in the Public Schools of the Province of Ontario* (Toronto: Ontario Department of Education, 1969).

of the National Anthem and the recitation of a prayer and should be held in the classroom in elementary schools and at the beginning of student assemblies in secondary schools. The commission also recommended that:

- moral education ("character-building") should pervade the whole curriculum from the beginning of elementary school to the end of secondary school;
- the schools should seek to provide information about and foster respect for all religions;
- secondary school history departments should offer a formal course of study dealing with the world's principal religions;
- appropriate preservice and in-service training in moral or values education and in religious education should be provided for teachers.

The report was not officially adopted by the government and the provisions in the regulation for religious education were not withdrawn. However, the report did lead to important changes in curriculum. The ministry and boards of education increasingly began to incorporate into the curriculum a moral and values education component that was distinct from religious education. And in 1971 a course entitled World Religions was developed for Senior Division students. During the same period, university departments of religious studies, as distinct from divinity colleges, were being established for the study of religion from a variety of perspectives. Such departments are now found in most universities in Canada.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the diversity of Ontario society steadily increased. The federal policy of multiculturalism strengthened the cultural presence of many ethnic groups, including a growing number of immigrants from many parts of the world and from various cultural and religious backgrounds. Many public school boards began to emphasize moral or values education, which is based on common values, and to reduce emphasis on religious education as such. No new legislation governing religious education in the public schools was enacted, however.

In 1989, a ministerial inquiry was established by the Ontario government to look into religious education in the public elementary schools. The inquiry was chaired by Dr. Glenn A. Watson, who presented his report to the Minister of Education in January 1990. The report contained much useful information. However, key recommendations were inconsistent with the decision of the Ontario Court of Appeal on January 30, 1990, that struck down the provincial regulation on religious education.

RECENT LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS

The adoption of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 provided a constitutional basis for seeking greater legal recognition and protection of a broad range of rights, among them the right of freedom of conscience and religion. The entrenchment of this right set in motion a process of modification of laws and regulations that had been made prior to 1982.

As part of this process of modification, on September 23, 1988, in response to a court challenge, the Ontario Court of Appeal struck down subsection 28(1) of Regulation 262, which had allowed public schools to open or close the school day with religious exercises that gave primacy to a particular faith.[3] In response to another legal challenge brought by a group of parents in Elgin County, on January 30, 1990, the Ontario Court of Appeal struck down subsection 28(4) of Regulation 262, which concerned the teaching of religion in the public elementary schools.[4] The court held

3. *Zylberberg v. Sudbury Board of Education* (1988), 65 O.R. (2d) 641 (C.A.).

4. *Canadian Civil Liberties Association v. Minister of Education* (1990), 71 O.R. (2d) 341 (C.A.) (hereafter cited as *Elgin County*).

subsection 28(4) to be invalid in public schools because it permitted the teaching of a single religious tradition as if it were the exclusive means through which to develop moral thinking and behaviour. The court also ruled, however, that education designed to teach about religion and to foster moral values, without indoctrination in a particular religious faith, would not contravene the charter.

The court elaborated on the differences between indoctrination and education in the following manner:

1. The school may sponsor the *study* of religion, but may not sponsor the *practice* of religion.
2. The school may *expose* students to all religious views, but may not *impose* any particular view.
3. The school's approach to religion is one of *instruction*, not one of *indoctrination*.
4. The function of the school is to *educate* about all religions, not to *convert* to any one religion.
5. The school's approach is *academic*, not *devotional*.
6. The school should *study* what all people believe, but should not *teach* a student what to believe.
7. The school should strive for student *awareness* of all religions, but should not press for student *acceptance* of any one religion.
8. The school should seek to *inform* the student about various beliefs, but should not seek to *conform* him or her to any one belief.[5]

5. *Elgin County;* quoted in Ministry of Education, Ontario, "Education About Religion in the Public Elementary and Secondary Schools", Policy/Program Memorandum No. 112 (Toronto: Ministry of Education, Ontario, December 6, 1990), p. 2.

Subsequent to the court's ruling, an interim policy for public elementary schools, dated February 28, 1990, was established to permit boards of education to provide programs in education about religion in the time previously used for religious education during the school day, as long as these programs were in accordance with the court's ruling. On December 6, 1990, the Ministry of Education announced the amendment of Regulation 262 governing religion in schools.[6] This permanent policy came into effect on January 1, 1991. The policy, which is outlined in Policy/Program Memorandum No. 112, refers only to the study and teaching of religions, not to opening and closing exercises.[7]

The policy does not permit boards of education to provide indoctrinational religious education. Boards may provide programs in education about religion during the regular school day as follows:

1. Boards of education may provide programs in education about religion in Grades 1 to 8 during the school day for up to 60 minutes per week.
2. Boards of education may continue to provide optional credit courses in World Religions in secondary schools, as specified in the curriculum guideline

6. Regulation 262 is now Regulation 298. In subsection 28(2), the regulation states:

A program of education about religion shall,

(a) promote respect for the freedom of conscience and religion guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; and

(b) provide for the study of different religions and religious beliefs in Canada and the world, without giving primacy to, and without indoctrination in, any particular religion or religious belief.

7. The provision of opening and closing exercises in public schools is not discussed in this document since it is dealt with in Ministry of Education, Ontario, "Opening or Closing Exercises in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools", Policy/Program Memorandum No. 108 (Toronto: Ministry of Education, Ontario, January 12, 1989) and Ministry of Education and Training, Ontario, *Opening or Closing Exercises for Public Schools in Ontario* (Toronto: Ministry of Education and Training, Ontario, 1993).

entitled *History and Contemporary Studies, Part C: Senior Division, Grades 11 and 12, 1987*. The program described in the guideline meets the court's definition of permissible education about religion.

3. Schools and programs, including programs in education about religion, under the jurisdiction of boards of education must meet both of the following conditions:

   a) They must not be indoctrinational.

   b) They must not give primacy to any particular religious faith. . . .[8]

The policy memorandum also defined the context for the amended regulation as follows:

> The . . . amendments to Regulation 262 are to be understood within the context of the long-established vision of the public elementary and secondary schools as places where people of diverse backgrounds can learn and grow together. The public schools are open and accessible to all on an equal basis and founded upon the positive societal values which, in general, Canadians hold and regard as essential to the well-being of our society. These values transcend cultures and faiths, reinforce democratic rights and responsibilities, and are founded on a fundamental belief in the worth of all persons.[9]

PROBLEMS IN DEFINING *RELIGION*

Defining the word *religion* is a difficult task. There have been many attempts and there is little agreement. Definitions that try to include all faiths (e.g., "religion is love" or "religion is a means of coping with life") are often criticized for being meaningless and may offend those who do not regard themselves as religious. On the other hand, definitions that are more specific (e.g., "religion is the service to and worship of a god") often are more appropriate for some religions than for others; such definitions may offend those who see themselves as religious but who do not believe in a god or belong to a religious organization.

The word *religion* conveys dramatically different meanings to different people. The definitions of some are informed solely by their own religious heritage; for example, a Christian might define religion as "personal relationship with Christ". Others' definitions reflect their personal experience with religion; for example, some might say that "religion is a feeling of security". Some definitions reflect the individual's positive or negative biases towards a particular religion or religion in general; for example, Karl Marx called religion "the opium of the people". Still others limit religion to what has been in the past and exclude emerging forms; such definitions do not recognize that there was a time when the religions known today did not exist, and that even religions with a long history and a strong sense of continuity have undergone important changes during their histories.

Generally, religions are seen to have personal, organizational, and cultural dimensions. For the purpose of his ministerial inquiry, Watson defined *religion* as "those beliefs which guide and determine an individual's attitude and behaviours regarding the value, purpose and meaning to life."[10] In contrast, Streng, Lloyd, and Allen defined religion as a means of ultimate transformation – personally, socially, or cosmologically. They saw religion as defining problems and providing both answers to those problems and the means by which answers can be internalized and expressed.[11]

8. Policy/Program Memorandum No. 112, pp. 2-3.

9. Ibid., p. 4.

10. Glenn A. Watson, *The Report of the Ministerial Inquiry on Religious Education in Ontario Public Elementary Schools* (Toronto: Government of Ontario, 1990), p. 38.

11. Frederick J. Streng, Charles L. Lloyd, and Jay T. Allen, *Ways of Being Religious: Readings for a New Approach to Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973).

There is a common tendency to distinguish between two different kinds of religion and to see a fundamental tension between them. The first kind is seen to distinguish between what is religious reality and what is non-religious reality. There is the concept of a transcendent, all-powerful God. God, and all manifestations of God (such as sacred sites, religious practices, religious language) are seen as separate from the rest of reality. The word *sacred* tends to be used to denote something set apart, separate from secular life. Definitions of religion based on this view may make reference to such things as doctrines, rituals, festivals, clergy, scriptures, places of worship, and groups of adherents. The second kind of religion is seen to view reality as an indivisible whole. There is no fundamental dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. The religious is an integral dimension of everyday life, and almost every aspect of daily life may be seen as endowed with religious significance. Followers seek enlightenment through spiritual discipline; the concept of a transcendent deity may be an alien one.

It is important not to assume that faiths like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam represent the first kind of religion, and faiths like Buddhism and Taoism, or aboriginal spiritual traditions, such as those of the Native peoples of Canada, represent the second. This view is overly simple and stereotypical. While there are dominant traditions in every religion, most religions comprise a tapestry of themes. This richness of belief and practice must be recognized and respected.

Moreover, the place and influence of religion in a society may look very different to a member of that society than it does to an outside observer. Someone who has grown up in Canada or the United States may think of churches and synagogues as separate from the rest of daily life. When visiting India, he or she may see that religion there pervades all aspects of life. On the other hand, a native of India may perceive his or her own society differently, and, on visiting Canada, may be sensitive to the many ways in which the Judaeo-Christian tradition influences everyday life here.

Religions have developed within certain cultural, social, economic, and historical circumstances, and have, in turn, influenced those circumstances. Religion may thus be studied from the point of view of the historian, the anthropologist, the sociologist, the psychologist, and so on. Yet, no matter how helpful such analyses of religion may be, they are not in themselves sufficient to explain the unique character of the religious phenomenon in any of its manifestations, whether it be called the "sacred", the "other", the "ground of being", or "God".

In short, religion is not a uniform concept. In order to develop an idea of what it is, many different aspects must be considered. They may include the traditional doctrines of various religions, their myths and symbols, their sacred writings, their religious communities, their religious experiences, and their mysticism. Within the context of a classroom and school that promotes mutual respect, programs in education about religion need not be based on a single definition. Instead, they should emphasize, in a manner that is appropriate to the age and level of maturity of the students, many aspects of religion in Canada and other parts of the world.

PART B

Programs in Education About Religion

RATIONALE

The court rulings and Ministry of Education and Training policy emphasize that the public schools do not have a mandate to instruct students in one faith to the exclusion of others, or to encourage students to believe in or profess a particular faith. Nor can they treat the religions studied as competing belief systems that offer an opportunity to make evaluative comparisons among them. These kinds of teaching are the prerogative of the family and the different faith communities, not of the public schools. Nevertheless, the nature of our society, of the individual, of the curriculum, and of the contemporary world make it appropriate and beneficial for the public schools to incorporate education about religion into the curriculum. Students need to acquire information about and develop respect for religions that are practised in Ontario and throughout the world. By providing the means for them to do so, schools can enhance students' understanding of themselves and others and of the world in which we live.

RELEVANCE IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

Ontario society has always encompassed people of diverse backgrounds and beliefs. The different groups of Native peoples have had a variety of spiritual beliefs and a variety of ways of expressing them. Immigrants to Canada initially came mainly from Britain, France, and other European countries, and their religious affiliations were primarily Christian, but this

broad category incorporated many different denominations with their own distinct doctrines, traditions, and forms of worship.

The pace of demographic change has accelerated in the past half century. On the one hand, the Ontario mosaic now includes significant and increasing numbers of people from most of the world's countries and geographical regions, representing well over a hundred different ethnocultural heritages and a corresponding variety of faiths and beliefs. On the other hand, large numbers of people today do not participate on a regular basis in the religious community they call their own or do not adhere to any particular religious community.

Ontarians are becoming increasingly aware that the values and principles governing their society must be compatible with the reality of pluralism. The following are some of the principles and values that apply in a pluralistic society:

- The society seeks to enhance the common good.
- It fosters mutual respect.
- It encourages appreciation of diversity.
- It seeks to provide equality of opportunity and fairness in the representation of different groups and interests.[12]

These principles and values need to be recognized in our public school system. The schools have a responsibility both to meet the needs of all students and to prepare students adequately for life in a multicultural, multifaith society.

The need for an informed response to pluralism has significant implications both for society and for education in the public schools. Ontario society is not without intolerance, including religious intolerance. The causes of intolerance are complex, but lack of acquaintance with one another as persons and lack of accurate knowledge of one another's culture and religious traditions are important contributing factors. Some examples of prejudice, stereotyped attitudes, and even hatred and violence among groups can be seen as arising not from their differences *per se* but rather from their lack of acquaintance with individuals from other backgrounds and their lack of knowledge and understanding of one another's traditions.

Education about religion can help to reduce barriers of ignorance between groups and to increase their mutual understanding and respect. Studying different faiths and getting to know their practitioners are important means of acquiring insight into people of different backgrounds. Greater comprehension of similarities and differences gives students the opportunity to develop values and attitudes that contribute to social harmony, such as appreciation of diversity, respect for those of different backgrounds, and a sense of community.

The development of such values and attitudes depends on the sensitivity and respect with which education about religion is conducted and requires an environment that fosters respect for the dignity and rights of all. The importance of maintaining fairness and balance in presenting different religious traditions cannot be emphasized too strongly. Where there is a religious dimension to a historical conflict, for example, students need to be encouraged to look beyond specific religious differences and to become aware of the political manipulation of religious allegiances, the ignorance, and the lack of understanding behind such a conflict. As well, teachers and students need to understand that, in considering the religious context of historical developments, it is not appropriate either to idealize any faith or to attack its integrity.

12. Adapted from Watson, *Report of the Ministerial Inquiry on Religious Education*, p. 26.

RELEVANCE TO THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT

It is a goal of the Ontario education system to educate the "whole" child. Education about religion can contribute to a curriculum that seeks to support not only the physical, intellectual, social, moral, and emotional, but also the spiritual growth of the child as he or she develops basic attitudes, values, and beliefs, and an understanding of life. In 1969, Keiller Mackay wrote that "a general knowledge of religions is necessary to form a well-educated person . . . [and] . . . it is an essential function of the educational system to instill knowledge about religion, as well as to develop the ideals, attitudes, and values derived from our heritage of which religion is a part."[13]

Education about religion can, for example, enhance students' awareness of the range of ways in which people acquire knowledge and beliefs about the world – that is, through inner feelings, intuitive insights, reason, and experience.

History shows that religion is one of the cornerstones of human identity. Education about religion can, therefore, help students to understand themselves and others better, by giving them opportunities to consider human spirituality.

Religion is also an important means by which human beings seek to understand some of the fundamental questions of human existence – such as questions about the meaning of being human, the importance of the individual, the meaning and purpose of life, the role of spirituality in human life, and the individual's relationship to the world.

By increasing students' awareness and appreciation of the central role of religion and spirituality in human life, the study of other faiths can also help students to acquire a deeper understanding and appreciation of their own spirituality and religious heritage.

RELEVANCE IN THE CURRICULUM

Students who know something about the diverse forms of religious belief and expression will find this knowledge beneficial in understanding other aspects of the curriculum. Religious belief and expression are an integral part of such aspects of society as politics, history, art, music, language and literature, architecture, attitudes to people, and attitudes to nature and the environment. Social and political movements frequently have roots in religious and moral teachings or are linked to religious institutions and their development. Such phenomena include imperialism and colonialism, social reform movements, temperance movements, and the development of democratic values. Historical events, too, are often intimately linked to religious beliefs. The history of Canada, for example, was shaped by a variety of religious traditions, including Native spiritual traditions and the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant churches. The development of government in Canada has been influenced by a variety of religious issues, and the history of education in Ontario has been closely tied to the history of the churches in Canada.

RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

An awareness and understanding of the role of religious belief in human life can help students understand contemporary social issues and world events more fully when they reach the level of maturity required to consider them. For example, religious beliefs have an important bearing on the debates about such issues as Sunday shopping, abortion, and the rights and status of women, children, homosexuals, minorities, and refugees. Global issues of war

13. Mackay, *Religious Information and Moral Development*, pp. 23 and 27.

and peace, human rights, and the distribution of wealth and power often have a religious dimension, too.

SUGGESTED LEARNING OUTCOMES

A program in education about religion should foster understanding about religion in Canadian and other contexts, and prepare students to participate effectively and harmoniously in the multicultural, multifaith society of Canada. More specifically, the outcomes of such a program can be seen in terms of the knowledge, skills, and values developed by the student and in terms of the different types of learning the student experiences.

Some of the outcomes identified below, particularly those that require abstract thinking, will be appropriate for students in the later grades but not for students in the earlier grades. Board members, principals, teachers, and curriculum-design committees that include parents will need to determine which outcomes are suitable for the students in a particular class.

Students can achieve the learning outcomes through different types of activities, for example, by gathering information individually or in groups and by discussing their findings with the teacher and other students. Such activities can help students to gain knowledge of various traditions, to develop their critical-thinking skills, and to develop understanding of others whose backgrounds are different from their own.

KNOWLEDGE

Students will demonstrate:

- awareness of a number of different religions;
- awareness of the multiplicity of beliefs, practices, and forms of worship in religious traditions;
- familiarity with some of the beliefs, customs, practices, literature, and arts of a number of different religious traditions, including spiritual traditions of Native peoples of Canada;
- awareness of universal symbols[14] and common themes in different religious traditions;
- understanding of the role of religion in the lives of individuals, the family, and society;
- understanding of the role of religions in helping people define purpose and meaning in life;
- understanding of the relevance of religion to historical developments and contemporary events and issues, including environmental issues;
- awareness of the achievements and impact of some religious leaders in various traditions.

SKILLS

Students will be able to:

- research, analyse, and communicate information about different religious traditions;
- think critically about facts, concepts, and issues related to the study of different religious traditions, and develop the ability to distinguish among facts, beliefs, and opinions.

VALUES

Students will demonstrate:

- appreciation of their own faith, cultural heritage, and identity;
- appreciation of the diversity of religious beliefs and practices;

14. Universal symbols are symbols that appear in almost all religions and that carry similar meanings or significance, e.g., water, light, the circle and its spokes, the tree and its roots. For example, in many cultures, water is a symbol of transformation, suggesting cleansing or the renewal of life on the one hand and, often as the sea or salt water, forgetfulness or death on the other.

- sensitivity to and respect for a wide variety of religious traditions;
- willingness to communicate with those who belong to faiths other than their own;
- appreciation of the significance of religion and spirituality as fundamental components of culture and human experience;
- understanding, respect, and tolerance based on accurate information;
- appreciation of the fact that mutual respect contributes to the common welfare of society.

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Boards and schools should ensure that learning takes place in an environment that is characterized by the following conditions:

- Teachers need to ensure that students from all backgrounds are treated with respect and that learning takes place in an atmosphere of trust and understanding.
- Teachers need to be familiar with the material and confident of the teaching approaches and strategies to be used. They also need to be aware of their biases and be able to transcend them in order to maintain balance and fairness in investigating various religious traditions.
- Activities should emphasize student inquiry and should be appropriate for the ages and abilities of the students in the class. They should help students develop self-esteem and an appreciation of their own cultural heritage and that of others.
- Students must be aware that they have the right not to divulge information about themselves or their family in class or in their projects.
- Principals and teachers need to ensure that regular communication with parents takes place and that parents feel that their views and concerns are heard and understood.

PROGRAM PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

In undertaking to design a program in education about religion, boards of education will need to determine the way in which the program will be incorporated into the overall curriculum, the content to be taught, and the way in which the content will be organized. They will also need to consider the appropriateness of the various activities for students at different ages and levels of maturity, the teaching approaches and strategies to be used, and the resources needed, and they will need to provide for the professional development of teachers.

INCORPORATION OF THE PROGRAM INTO THE CURRICULUM

Boards of education will need to decide first how the program wil be incorporated into the curriculum. They may choose to integrate the program fully or partially, or they may wish to offer a discrete program that has a specific portion of the school week allotted to it. The decision about which method to choose will depend on various circumstances within the class or school. For example, a board could decide to integrate the program fully for the earlier grades but to offer it as a discrete area of study for the later grades.

The following outline of the benefits of both types of program may assist boards in choosing among the various options.

An integrated program has the following advantages:

- It can be incorporated into the curriculum in such a way as to prevent an overcrowded timetable.
- It is readily adaptable to different levels and to school-wide activities.
- It allows a flexible, open-ended approach.
- It allows a great variety of material about religious beliefs, practices, and experiences to be introduced.
- It encourages students to make connections between the program and other areas of the curriculum.
- Since the overall curriculum for Grades 1 to 8 must be delivered in an integrated way, a program in education about religion can easily be incorporated into the existing framework.

A discrete program has the following advantages:

- It may be adapted, in both content and method of delivery, to different levels.
- It allows attention to be focused expressly on religion.
- It can more easily accommodate activities that focus expressly on developing students' knowledge and skills in the study of religions.
- It permits study in greater depth.
- It facilitates standardization of the program from school to school.
- It may be more easily monitored.
- Since a specific time is allotted for it, students requesting exemption can be more easily withdrawn from it.
- It provides a clearer focus for a specific teacher-education course and for in-service education programs.

PROGRAM CONTENT

Criteria for Selection

Boards and curriculum-design committees will need to develop criteria for selecting the content to be taught in their program. In developing their criteria, they will need to take into consideration the requirements for education about religion that are given in the *Elgin County* decision, in Regulation 298, and in the ministry's Policy/Program Memorandum No. 112. They will also need to consider the nature of Ontario society and the local community, the needs of the students, and various practical aspects of such a program.

A program in education about religion must include material about diverse religious beliefs and practices. The values derived from the various beliefs could also be the object of study.

Those who are developing programs will need to strike a balance between the requirement to include a range of representative religions and the practical need to limit the amount of material so that students can achieve some depth of understanding. In determining which of the world's numerous religious traditions will be studied, boards should consider including some of the religions that have the largest numbers of adherents worldwide, for example, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. They should also include spiritual traditions of Native peoples of Canada. Contemporary religious movements and religious traditions represented in the local community and in Ontario as a whole should also be considered in the selection process.

It is important to ensure that the material selected will be meaningful to students. An approach dealing with contemporary aspects of various faiths and the more tangible aspects of religious expression will have broad appeal to elementary students.

Content for Grades 1 to 3 should focus on the more practical and concrete aspects of religious traditions, such as festivals and holy days, scriptures and artefacts, and specific rituals. The role of the family in religion could also be a focal point. Students should also participate in learning activities that introduce the sense of wonder that is inherent in many religions.

From Grade 4 to Grade 8, subject matter that invites inquiry and reflection could be introduced. Activities could include research about the lives of religious personages, visits to religious sites (with parental consent), an examination of events that illustrate the role of religion in history, or the application of a story from a particular tradition to contemporary life; for example, the Skywoman story from the Longhouse tradition, the story of the Prodigal Son from both the Buddhist and the Christian traditions, or the story of the Six Blind Men and the Elephant from the Hindu tradition.

Almost all areas of the existing curriculum can serve as a springboard for education about religion. Consideration of Native spirituality, for example, could develop naturally out of environmental studies. There is also a religious dimension to equity issues, environmental issues, family studies, local community studies, values and moral issues, political issues, history and social studies, health and physical education, nutrition, language and literature, art and architecture, and music. It is important, however, to develop a unifying theme or teaching approach to enable students to acquire a coherent view of the religious beliefs and practices studied.

Organization

There are many ways in which material about religion can be incorporated into the curriculum. The program could be based on one or more different approaches – for example, thematic, biographical, or historical. Regardless of the approach(es) chosen, examples from a wide variety of faiths must be included.

A *thematic approach* could be adapted to suit an integrated program, a discrete program, or a combination of the two. Concentration on one particular aspect in the study of several religious traditions may help students to appreciate similarities among the different traditions. The program could include consideration of such themes as the following:

- The theme of "myself and others", with a focus on the immediate environment, could be developed for the youngest children. Activities could, for example, draw students' attention to the fact that people are different in size and shape, and then make them aware that people also have different ideas and that children and their families attend different places of worship and celebrate different festivals.
- Some of the same elements or symbols – such as fire, light, or water – occur in different religious traditions and could be considered as themes that occur cross-culturally.
- A seasonal theme could focus on the rituals, celebrations, and festivals of different religious traditions at different times of the year; for example, solstice celebrations, festivals of lights, New Year's festivals, harvest festivals, or spring festivals. Since festive occasions often have some connection with art, music, food, drama, and science, study of these celebrations can be linked to the study of many other subject areas. This theme could thus be dealt with in some way in many types of school activities and at every grade level.

A *biographical approach* could also be considered, focusing on stories about the lives of people who are important to the different religious traditions – the founder(s) of a faith, for example, or other holy people and religious leaders.

Even if the entire program is not organized on this basis, the biographical dimension can be a valuable addition to the study of different religious traditions.

A *historical approach* to the study of religion, in which people and ideas are examined within the context of their times, could be valuable. Such an approach would not be appropriate for the earlier grades and might begin in Grades 7 and 8.

Part C of this document presents a sample program framework that is intended to help boards in developing programs of study that are appropriate for the various grade levels in elementary schools.

TEACHING STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES

Teachers will need to select strategies that are appropriate for the type of content and the method of organization and presentation of that content. In the selection of teaching strategies, individual students' learning styles (auditory, visual, kinesthetic, etc.) will need to be considered. The choice of strategies will also depend on the types of resources that are available. Teachers should attempt to provide a wide range of learning opportunities that will help students develop the ability to observe, discover, reason (e.g., conduct an inquiry, solve problems), record, and communicate. A balance between teacher-directed and student-centred activities is desirable.

Variety in activities is facilitated by the use of grouping. Students can do some activities as a class (e.g., visiting religious sites or museums, planning projects, listening to and telling stories, or viewing films), some in small groups or with a partner (e.g., comparing notes, co-operative research, or working on an art project), and some independently (e.g., independent research, conducting interviews, or providing information or artefacts from home).

Resources should be varied, appropriate to different age levels, and suitable for a range of activities. Materials need to be carefully evaluated to ensure that the information they contain is factually correct and free from negative bias and stereotyping. Care is needed when inviting visitors to speak to the class to ensure that they understand and will comply with the non-indoctrinational philosophy of the program.

The usual school and classroom-based resources include: library materials, textbooks, and storybooks; audio-visual aids, such as films, videotapes, and slides; and such materials as calendars and scriptures. Teachers can augment traditional school-based resources with human resources and community-based resources. Human resources could include guest speakers or artists. Community-based resources might include museums, cultural centres, and the religious buildings of the different faiths, as well as folk-arts festivals and even classmates' homes (e.g., for visits during festival times, when appropriate). While it is important that the program reflect aspects of the local communities, the ministry's policy on education about religion requires that no primacy be given to any particular faith and that programs reflect the multifaith nature of Ontario society.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS

A central factor contributing to the success of the program will be the classroom teacher's knowledge, professional skill, sensitivity, and objectivity. Teachers should be aware of their own biases and realize that they must not impose their own beliefs when teaching about other religious traditions. It is important for boards to take steps to ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to teach the program.

It would be helpful if teachers presenting a program of study about religion had an

academic qualification in religious studies at the university level. Boards should encourage teachers to acquire the relevant education by recognizing the value of preservice and graduate education in their hiring practices. They should also assist teachers by providing appropriate in-service education.

In-service education should include providing teachers with opportunities to develop their knowledge of various religions through special workshops and conferences. Teachers should also have opportunities to learn about faiths other than their own from people of those faiths. Boards should also incorporate a religious studies component into regularly scheduled professional development activities. All such courses should include material on the rationale for programs in education about religion, on the kind of content to be included, on teaching approaches and strategies, and on resources. Boards should also ensure that teachers have access to resource people with expertise in the field of religious studies who can provide support and advice to teachers as needed.

CONSULTATION IN DEVELOPING COURSES OF STUDY

The process for developing courses of study should include consultation with teachers, students, parents or guardians, and other members of the community. This consultation and co-operation within the school system and community are important for the following reasons:

- Consultation is consistent with the democratic values that are central to the public school system and to the ministry's policy on the study of religion in the public schools.
- The process of consultation facilitates communication, promotes mutual understanding and respect, and enables the participants to come to an agreement that considers various viewpoints.
- The process of consultation can help to build consensus about the content of a program about religions by fostering understanding and appreciation of the program's educational role in reinforcing positive moral and societal values.
- The contributions made by teachers, students, parents or guardians, and community groups can greatly enrich the program and enable it to meet the needs of the students.

Boards of education are encouraged to form an advisory or consultative committee to undertake broad-based consultation. Initially, the role of such committees would be to assist boards in making an informed policy decision about whether or not to introduce the study of religion into their schools.

In forming a committee, boards of education could consult with regional education offices, university religious studies departments, and interfaith bodies to identify experts who might be invited to participate. They could ask students, parents or guardians, members of various faiths in the local community, and members of other local groups to name representatives to participate in the advisory committee. Boards should actively seek representation from groups whose voices are less likely to be heard. The committee membership would also need to include board of education trustees and administrators. Boards are encouraged to designate a board staff person to provide direction and act as a liaison between the board and the advisory committee.

Care is needed when requesting assistance and information from community groups to ensure that those consulted meet the following requirements:

- They must have relevant expertise.
- They must represent a broad spectrum of opinion within a group.

– They must understand that they are acting in an advisory capacity and that the final responsibility for the policy decision lies with the board.

Once formed, the advisory committee might identify and consult with experts in the field; call public meetings to inform the various constituencies about the possible introduction of education about religion in the curriculum; provide information to the community about the reasons for the proposed change; hear submissions from interested parties; and organize workshops to educate themselves and board members about relevant issues, policies, and materials. The committee would then present its findings to the board trustees and administrators, and the board would use this information in considering whether or not to incorporate a program of education about religion into the curriculum.

Boards that decide to develop a program should then form a curriculum-design committee to develop the program. The composition of this committee will not necessarily be the same as that of the advisory committee, although it may include some representatives from the advisory committee. Among the participants should be people with specific expertise in curriculum design, representatives from the different faiths who have specific training in the tenets of their faith, people who are knowledgeable about promoting interfaith understanding, faculty members of religious studies departments or programs, and some parents or guardians of students in the local community.

The curriculum-design committee should emphasize and actively seek the presentation of different points of view, and should establish procedures for the development of the program that will enable members of the community to contribute to the program in a meaningful way.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

Boards of education will need to develop implementation plans that address such matters as staff and community involvement, the planning process, and support activities. It may be appropriate and useful to seek assistance from the advisory committee at this stage as well.

In providing for the involvement of staff and community members during implementation, boards will need to:

– determine who should participate in the implementation team;

– identify leadership roles for such people as supervisory officers, principals, consultants, teachers, and parents and other representatives of the community;

– provide appropriate in-service education that will help teachers make changes in their teaching practices and that will introduce them to appropriate teaching materials;

– develop a method of communication to inform parents or guardians and other community members about the policy and program and to enable them to make their views and wishes known;

– provide opportunities for coaching and for teachers and community members to exchange ideas;

– provide each school with assistance in staff development, changes in courses of study, and the use of resources, and in the briefing and monitoring of visitors and guest speakers.

In planning the implementation of the program, boards will need to:

- develop a system-wide implementation plan;
- develop a budget;
- set realistic timelines;
- develop implementation plans for each school;
- develop criteria for evaluating the degree to which the goals of the implementation plans are being met.

To support the process of implementation, boards will need to:

- develop guides and resource materials for local use;
- familiarize teachers with new curriculum materials;
- monitor system, school, and classroom implementation processes;
- provide long-term support to principals and teachers to maintain and consolidate the program;
- provide appropriate in-service education for teachers.

Implementation plans might include introduction of the program through a pilot project. During monitoring and evaluation of the pilot program, boards should seek the views of teachers and students involved in the program, as well as the views of the students' parents or guardians. The views of those in the school and community (e.g., teachers, students, and parents or guardians) who are not participating in the pilot program will also be relevant. Evaluation of the program should be carried out by the board person who is responsible for the program, teachers in the program, students in the program and their parents or guardians, and members of the advisory committee and/or curriculum-design committee.

Subsequent to the pilot program and its review, wider implementation may follow. When reviewing and revising the program, boards may find it helpful to co-operate and exchange information with other boards that have similar programs. Within the parameters of provincial policy, however, the needs, wishes, and concerns of the local community should take precedence over practices adopted in other jurisdictions.

PART C

Sample Program Framework

INTRODUCTION

In Part B of this resource guide, it was stated that a program in education about religion could be integrated fully or partially into the curriculum or offered as a discrete program (see pages 14-15). Since boards may wish to set up a program that shows the connections between education about religion and other subject areas, the sample program framework provided here is organized loosely around themes that can be linked to themes and learning activities that are integral to most subject areas. For example, a theme focusing on spring may include discussion of creation stories and rituals associated with birth and growth.

The program should focus on the child and his or her immediate experiences as a starting point, exploring the spiritual dimension of those ways in which people give order and meaning to their lives. People shape experience through rituals, and, although the forms vary across cultures, the purposes are often similar. The lives of people are enriched and their appreciation of their own tradition is deepened by awareness of how others in diverse cultures use similar and different metaphors and rituals to give shape to their experiences and aspirations.

While programs in education about religion may contribute to students' achievement of learning outcomes given in *The Common Curriculum, Grades 1–9*,[15] it must be recognized that outcomes given expressly for education about religion, such as those on pages 13-14 of this document, should also be achieved. Teachers need to be aware that education about religion is a distinct subject area that can benefit students in many ways, such as those outlined in the following excerpt:

> The educational approach does not seek to nurture participants in a particular faith. It does nurture in other ways. It nurtures them in the view that religion has been and remains an important phenomenon in life deserving of intelligent study. It nurtures them, hopefully, in coming to an understanding and respect for the beliefs and customs of their neighbours. It nurtures them in an attitude towards religions which recognizes that in the real world, it has been and can be, both beneficial and harmful. . . . It nurtures also by assuming that engagement in such a study will lead to growth, mutual enrichment and greater insight into the truth by all. Finally, it nurtures by its assumption that people make religious decisions and commitments and that it is a good thing when they are based on the broadest possible knowledge and experience.[16]

There are many valid and respectful ways of helping students develop their understanding of the spiritual dimension of human experience without pressing on them the beliefs and concepts of any particular religion. Respectful awareness of the viewpoints of various religious traditions is also part of students'

15. Ministry of Education and Training, Ontario, *The Common Curriculum, Grades 1–9, February 1993* (Toronto: Ministry of Education and Training, Ontario, 1993).

16. W. A. Gilbert, "Religious Education in the Public Schools: Are Ontario Students Being Shortchanged?", *Ontario Education* (May-June 1983), p. 10.

growing awareness of both themselves and others. Whether students hold to a particular religion or to no religion, they can learn to appreciate the attempts of diverse cultures to search for meaning through a variety of metaphors, symbols, and practices. A successful program will be one that enables students to develop their sense of wonder and curiosity, as well as an appreciation for others' expressions of their perceptions.

PROGRAM CONTENT

In the chart that follows, several themes and topics are suggested for exploration in connection with education about religion.

Although some of the themes are more explicitly about religion than others, they may also be considered in a broader sense. For example, in dealing with the theme "Sacred Books and Places", teachers may begin by considering various kinds of books and then introduce stories from different religions without necessarily going into detail about the role of a specific scripture in a particular religious tradition. Similarly, they may deal with the concept of sacred places by considering various types of places, first familiar places and then buildings or other locations that are thought of as sacred. The theme "Signs and Symbols", which also has explicit connections with religion, may be considered in connection with religion as well as with literature and the arts.

Teachers may treat all of the suggested themes in a similar way, establishing connections with other parts of the curriculum. Suggested activities for the theme "Relationships" are provided on pages 26-29. Teachers should ensure that activities deal with various religious traditions so that students can broaden their understanding of religion.

It should always be made very clear to students that they have the right not to divulge information about themselves or their family in the exploration of any of the themes dealt with in education about religion. Students should know before beginning a written activity whether they will be sharing any of what they write with the class and, if so, what portions will be shared. Students must not feel that they have to discuss any aspects of their own background in class or in their projects.

SUGGESTED THEMES AND TOPICS

Note: The topics given in italics focus on the religious dimension of the themes and should receive emphasis. They may also be focal points for the discussion of interconnections among subject areas.

Themes	General Topics	Specific Topics		
		Grades 1 to 3	Grades 4 to 6	Grades 7 and 8
Relationships	• self, family, peers, community, global community	• personal identity • family • neighbours • friends • *religion of self and neighbours*	• relationships between self, peers, and family members • *the family within different cultural and religious traditions* • interdependence of groups in a community • *faith communities in the neighbourhood* • the need for respect for the views of others	• individuals as social beings in a pluralistic society • belonging in relation to identity • interdependence of groups within the global community • *responses of people of various religious traditions to contemporary social issues* • *universal beliefs as rules for living together co-operatively*
Occasions	• celebrations and festivals • happy and sad occasions	• feelings about happy and sad occasions • *community/family celebrations of religious origin*	• finding meaning through happy and sad occasions • *the multiplicity of religious beliefs and practices*	• *beliefs and practices of selected religious traditions* • *preservation of religious identity by families in a pluralistic society*
Beginnings and Endings	• birth, life, death, and rebirth cycle • creation	• growth and change • seasonal changes • feelings about birth and death • *creation stories*	• life cycles in nature • human life cycle • *similarities and differences between creation stories*	• *attitudes in various religious traditions towards life and death* • *rites associated with beginnings and endings* • *symbolism as it pertains to creation and the life cycle*
Signs and Symbols	• universal symbols, e.g., light, darkness, water, fire • patterns, shapes, and colours	• patterns and shapes in signs and symbols • *the universality of religious signs and symbols*	• *meanings of various signs and symbols, including universal symbols* • *significance of religious signs and symbols*	• *communication of beliefs through concrete and abstract signs and symbols* • the impact of distorted uses of symbols • *metaphors for the transcendent, the holy, God, etc.* • symbolism in the arts and literature

Themes	General Topics	Specific Topics		
		Grades 1 to 3	Grades 4 to 6	Grades 7 and 8
Rituals and Customs	• practices, worship • dress • food	• rituals in daily living • special times and spaces • *forms of dress in diverse religious traditions* • *special rules for use of food in diverse religious traditions* • *stories behind special rituals*	• ceremonies for special occasions • *various forms and occasions of worship* • *special significance of fasts (e.g., Ramadan) and festivals, including special foods and activities* • *stories and scriptures behind practices in various traditions*	• *worship in diverse traditions* • *the meaning behind expressions of faith in diverse traditions* • *similar and different insights in various religious traditions*
Journeys	• journeys as adventure • quest and pilgrimage • transitions and rites of passage	• the idea of journeys, e.g., storybook, fairy tale, or imaginary journeys	• quest and adventure • *life journeys of religious figures*	• life symbolized as journey • *rites of passage, e.g., confirmation, bar and bat mitzvah* • *cultural and religious conflict, e.g., the Crusades, contacts between missionaries and aboriginal peoples* • decisive points in life • *religious journeys, e.g., pilgrimages, responses to persecution or conflict*
Harmony With Nature	• values associated with aboriginal and other religious traditions • environmental sensitivity • responses to nature • global interdependence	• patterns in nature and life, e.g., cycles • *beauty and awe in poetry, art, scripture* • *traditional stories about animals, including those of Native peoples of Canada*	• *cycle and ritual in aboriginal traditions* • *interrelationship between humans and the natural environment* • mystery and beauty in nature • *origin of some religious customs and traditions in responses to nature*	• *aboriginal spirituality and its impact on other religious traditions* • *religious perspectives on exploitation and preservation of the environment* • interdependence of life forms, e.g., need for food sources worldwide • *reverence for the beauty of nature in various traditions*

Themes	General Topics	Specific Topics		
		Grades 1 to 3	Grades 4 to 6	Grades 7 and 8
Leadership	• kinds of leaders • biographies of great religious leaders • qualities of leadership • leaders and disciples	• *stories about religious leaders in various traditions*	• leaders as teachers • leaders who have made a difference in how we value life • *characteristics of religious or spiritual leaders* • *roles assigned to leaders in religious communities*	• *qualities of some specific spiritual leaders* • *identity, context, and achievements of major religious leaders and prophets* • *distinctive aspects of the teaching of great leaders and the impact of their teaching* • *the role of religious leaders in the development of Canada* • *quiet leaders (e.g., Jean Vanier, Mother Teresa) and forms of quiet leadership*
Sacred Books and Places*	• kinds of sacred places and their significance • the origin of religious traditions in stories and scriptures • forms of worship • literature, art, music, and architecture from various religious traditions	• "special" books and stories and "special" places • *religious stories, poetry, music, and art* • *houses of worship in the local community*	• *architecture of places of worship in various traditions* • *stories, poetry, music, and art from a variety of religious traditions* • *similar stories in different religious traditions* • *rites associated with sacred places and sacred books*	• *the origin, history, and content of the sacred writings in various traditions* • *forms of sacred literature* • *common themes in sacred literature* • *the architecture of places of worship and its symbolic significance in different traditions* • *forms of worship in various traditions* • *language and the experience of the transcendent*

* This theme may be combined with "Rituals and Customs" or "Signs and Symbols".

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES FOR THE THEME "RELATIONSHIPS"

The themes given in the chart on pages 23-25 focus to varying degrees on religious concepts. "Relationships" is the most general of the themes given and can therefore include discussion not only of religion but of many other subject areas. Since the idea of relationships will appear throughout the curriculum, religion may be introduced in this broader context and then explored through topics that focus on more specific aspects of religion. The study of religion can contribute in a very positive way to the study of relationships.

The following ideas for activities are not intended to be exhaustive but are suggestions for developing the theme of relationships in connection with religion.

Grades 1 to 3

In the early grades, students should begin to be aware of themselves as individuals, as well as members of a family, a community, and society in general. They should also learn to appreciate the individuality of others. More specifically, they should become aware that religious beliefs and practices contribute to the distinctiveness of various traditions and that they should respect different views.

In an activity designed to help students develop their awareness and knowledge of themselves and others, the teacher could begin by constructing a "web" or network with the students that focuses on the individual's relationship to various aspects of religion. On the chalkboard or a large piece of chart paper, the teacher could write "me" in the centre. To help the students define the "me" more clearly, the teacher might share some personal information (e.g., birthday, favourite colour, favourite hobby) and ask the students to provide similar information.

Using pictures or words, each student could then construct his or her own web privately, answering some questions such as the following:

- What do I look like (e.g., height, hair colour, eye colour)?
- What are some of the things I like to do?
- What are some of the things I do well?
- What qualities do I like in people (e.g., kindness, sense of humour)?
- What are some of the groups to which I belong (e.g., clubs, teams, religious organizations)?
- Who are some of the members of my family?
- What are some of the special days my family celebrates?
- How do we celebrate those special days (e.g., special dress, foods, activities)?

The answers that students volunteer to some of these questions could be used as springboards for discussion of topics connected with religion.

Alternatively, the web could be constructed in the form of a booklet. Students could add information to it during the whole school year and discuss some of it in class, if appropriate. For example, differences and similarities among cultural traditions could be focal points for discussions of variety and distinctiveness in traditions and in religious beliefs and customs.

Follow-up activities may include discussion of things that students bring to class with their parents' permission, such as books, objects, pictures, food, music, stories, or types of special dress.

The ethnocultural composition of the class and the character of the local community should determine some of the content of discussions on religion. It may be possible, for example, to obtain pictures, books, or videotapes to increase students' understanding of different traditions and their contributions. Alternatively, parents might visit the classroom to provide information.

Grades 4 to 6

Discussion of religion may be undertaken with reference to any of the specific topics given for Grades 4 to 6 in the chart on page 23. The activities suggested below, however, have been developed for the two topics that focus expressly on aspects of religion.

1. The family within different cultural and religious traditions

This topic could be explored in the following way:

- The teacher and students talk together about the concept of family.
- The teacher divides the class into five groups and asks each group to study the family in one religious tradition. Each group should study a different religion.
- The students should make use of a variety of available resources, which could include books in the classroom and in the school library, videotapes, other students, and members of the local community, as appropriate.
- When they have gathered sufficient information, the groups of students should share their findings with the whole class.
- The teacher could provide additional information while students are doing their research and while they are giving their presentations to the class.

2. Faith communities in the neighbourhood

Activity 1

- The teacher and students work out a definition of a community.
- The students list all the groups, agencies, and organizations in the local community that they can think of, and then categorize the groups into such classes as government, helping agencies, and religious organizations or communities.
- The students gather information about the various groups by reading brochures or doing interviews, for example, in order to determine what their distinctive contributions are. They also might consider where the contributions of various groups overlap.
- When they have completed their research, they should report their findings to the class.

Activity 2

Students examine either their own religious tradition or another religious tradition in the neighbourhood. It is desirable that students study a tradition other than their own, so that they can develop greater breadth of understanding of other people. However, since many students do not belong to any particular religion, they may benefit from studying the religious tradition of their ancestors. In this way, they can develop an appreciation of their own roots.

In their study of a religion, students might answer such questions as the following:

- How does that religion give support to its members?
- How do members of that religion interact with other groups?

In exploring different religions in the community, students might answer such additional questions as the following:

- What are the similarities and differences between the religions in the community?
- What special contributions do the various religions make to the community?
- What are some of the beliefs of various religions that have to do with social relationships?

In dealing with the last question, some students or groups of students in Grade 5 or 6 might begin to investigate the origin and development of a religion in its social and geographical context, or they might study the life and teachings of a major figure in a religion.

Grades 7 and 8

The activities suggested below have been developed for three of the specific topics given for Grades 7 and 8 in the chart on page 23. Although these topics do not all focus expressly on religion, they can be used as bases for discussion of religious traditions, beliefs, and practices.

1. Belonging in relation to identity

This topic may be explored through constructing a "web" much like the one described in the activity for Grades 1 to 3 (see page 26).

The need to belong to a community and the need to nurture one's own roots could be discussed, and a description of the neighbourhood could be prepared. Some attention should be given to the contributions of various ethnocultural groups to the community; to the distinctiveness of traditions, including religious traditions; and to areas of actual or potential conflict that results from misunderstanding.

2. Interdependence of groups within the global community

The following are some of the activities that could be undertaken in the investigation of this topic:

- examination of the dependence of both individual communities and the whole world on food, natural resources, and manufactured goods
- examination of environmental issues
- study of the extent to which developed and developing countries are interdependent, and of the reasons for this interdependence
- investigation of traditional values and beliefs connected with the responsibility to relieve suffering, and research on various secular and religious groups or on individuals who are involved in the relief of suffering
- discussion of the meaning of *neighbour* in the context of the local community and the world

In an investigation of environmental issues, students should be made aware that respect for the natural environment is emphasized in the teachings of many religious traditions. The creation stories in the Bible and in Native spiritual traditions, for example, indicate an awareness of the interconnections between people, animals, and nature, as do many stories and concepts in Hinduism. Through becoming acquainted with both scientific and religious views, students can develop a better understanding of the relationship between people and the natural environment.

3. Universal beliefs as rules for living together co-operatively

Exploration of the theme "Relationships" might conclude with an examination of beliefs that, for example, encourage people to respect one another and to treat others as they themselves would like to be treated. The following are possible activities:

- study of universal beliefs in specific religious traditions through reading stories in various scriptures
- study of religious leaders who have expressed ideas that have universal significance
- examination of what people in various traditions have considered to be ideal human behaviour and ideal communities
- design of an ideal society by the whole class

Ideas about living in harmony could be considered in conjunction with a study of Article 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

PART D

Resources

INTRODUCTION

The publications listed below may be of assistance to boards and schools in the development and implementation of a program in education about religion. Only a short list is given here, but several of the books contain more extensive bibliographies.

It should be noted that, although these resources express many different points of view of which educators should be aware, these views do not necessarily reflect those of the Ministry of Education and Training.

PEDAGOGICAL WORKS

Beck, Clive. *Better Schools: A Values Perspective.* New York: Falmer Press, 1990.

In this book a Canadian educator examines education about religion within the context of values education.

Grimmitt, Michael. *Religious Education and Human Development.* Great Wakering, Essex, Eng.: McCrimmon, 1987.

This book provides theory and practical applications. It includes an outline of curriculum resources for Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism, and detailed units on specific topics. It is an elaboration of his earlier book, *What Can I Do in R. E.?* (2nd ed., McCrimmon, 1978).

Hinnells, John R., ed. *A Handbook of Living Religions.* Markham, Ont.: Penguin Books, 1984.

This is one of many books that give an overview of the major religious traditions. It is useful as background information for teachers.

Holn, Jean. *Teaching Religion in School: A Practical Approach.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.

This book is similar to Grimmitt's books, but simpler.

Jackson, Robert, ed. *Approaching World Religions.* London: John Murray, 1982.

This book contains essays by British educators on theory and practice in education about religion.

Jackson, Robert, and Starkings, Dennis, eds. *The Junior R. E. Handbook.* Cheltenham, Eng.: Stanley Thornes, 1990.

This book discusses theory and practice in education about religion for older elementary school children.

Moran, Gabriel. *Religious Education As a Second Language.* Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1989.

This is a plea for education about religion by an American Roman Catholic educator. It provides a general introduction to the topic and some information on social context, but no practical applications.

Read, G.; Rudge, J.; and Howarth, R. *How Do I Teach R. E.?* London: Mary Glasgow, 1986.

This is the basic teacher's manual for the Westhill Project on education about religion for students aged five to sixteen. Separate manuals for teachers and workbooks for students on each of the major world religions are being published. Overall, the project provides a comprehensive curriculum for elementary education about religion.

World Religions in Education 1992-93: Religion and Truth. Available from the SHAP Working Party on World Religion in Education, c/o The National Religious Education Centre, 23 Kensington Square, London W8 5HN, England.

Each year the SHAP group publishes a journal focusing on some aspect of education about religion, as well as the *SHAP Calendar of Religious Festivals* for the year.

CLASSROOM RESOURCES

Joy Through the World: Celebrations, Feasting and Crafts Around the World. New York: Allen D. Bragdon and the U.S. Committee for UNICEF, 1985. Distributed by Dodd Mead.

This lavishly illustrated book includes descriptions of festivals around the world, as well as activities and recipes for students.

The Multifaith Calendar. Available from Canadian Ecumenical Action, 33 Arrow-Wood Place, Port Moody, British Columbia V3H 4J1.

This resource, which is published annually, includes not only the festivals and special days of the world's major religions, but sensitively written comments on the occasions and a brief introduction to each religion. The calendar is multicoloured and illustrated. It is available for purchase in bulk.

Prince, Helen. *Alexander's Journey.* Ottawa: Brotherhood of Anglican Churchmen, Diocese of Ottawa, 1993. Available from Dr. Douglas Walkinshaw, 2344 Haddington Crescent, Ottawa, Ontario K1H 8J4.

By means of stories and accompanying activities, this one-year program introduces students to the major world religions and to Native spirituality. It includes a text, student resources, and a teacher's guide.

Rankin, John. *Religious Education Across the Curriculum: Topics for the Primary School.* Harlow: Longman, 1991.

This book contains many practical suggestions for teaching children aged five to eleven.

JOURNALS

British Journal of Religious Education. Available from Christian Education Movement, Royal Buildings, Victoria Street, Derby DE1 1GW, England.

This is the quarterly journal of the Professional Council for Religious Education in Britain. It contains articles on theory, research, and practice, as well as reviews of current resources.

Religious Education. Available from the Religious Education Association of the United States and Canada, 409 Prospect Street, New Haven, Connecticut 06511-2177.

This is the quarterly journal of the Religious Education Association of the United States and Canada. It is a basic resource for both theorists and teachers. It focuses on theory and research and also contains reviews.

R. E. Today. Available from Christian Education Movement, Royal Buildings, Victoria Street, Derby DE1 1GW, England.

This quarterly magazine for the classroom teacher focuses on practical applications.

GENERAL REFERENCES

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ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES OFFERING PROGRAMS IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Boards of education are urged to consult universities with religious studies departments when designing programs in education about religion. In these institutions, religion is studied from a variety of perspectives, without commitment to a particular doctrinal point of view.

The following universities offer undergraduate, M.A., and Ph.D. programs:

McMaster University
Department of Religious Studies
Hamilton, Ontario
L8S 4K1

University of Ottawa
Department of Religious Studies
Ottawa, Ontario
K1N 6N5

University of Toronto
Centre for Religious Studies
Toronto, Ontario
M5S 1A1

The following universities offer undergraduate and M.A. programs:

Carleton University
Department of Religion
Ottawa, Ontario
K1S 5B6

Wilfrid Laurier University
Department of Religion and Culture
Waterloo, Ontario
N2L 3C5

University of Windsor
Department of Religious Studies
Windsor, Ontario
N9B 3P4

Courses and/or programs in religious studies are offered at the undergraduate level at most other universities and colleges in Ontario.

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Project Co-ordinator: English-Language Version

Ron Wideman
Curriculum Policy Development Branch
Ministry of Education and Training

Project Co-ordinator: French-Language Version

André E. Vachon
Curriculum Policy Development Branch
Ministry of Education and Training

Writing Team

Robert Choquette
Department of Religious Studies
University of Ottawa

André E. Vachon
Curriculum Policy Development Branch
Ministry of Education and Training

Ron Wideman
Curriculum Policy Development Branch
Ministry of Education and Training

Steering Committee

Jean-Baptiste Arhanchiague
Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens

John Bothwell
Ecumenical Study Commission on Public Education

Rina Chakravarti
Ontario Provincial Interfaith Committee on Chaplaincy, Hindu Representative

Harry Fernhout
Ontario Multi-faith Group for Equity in Education

Myrna Kroeker
Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario

Edmond Lipsitz
Canadian Jewish Congress

Elizabeth Pamp
Consultant on Native Spirituality

Bill Pike
Ontario Public School Teachers' Federation

Don Santor
Ecumenical Study Commission on Public Education

Jake Thomas
Consultant on Native Spirituality

Carl Tuyl
Ontario Provincial Interfaith Committee on Chaplaincy, Christian Reformed Representative

Contributors to the Sample Program Framework

Dale Beale
Ottawa Board of Education

Dianne Carr
Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry County Board of Education

Peter Evans
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Ottawa Valley Centre

William A. Gilbert
Anglican Diocese of Ottawa

Marilyn Gouthro
Lakehead Board of Education

Bev Millar
Carleton Board of Education

Doug Palmer (retired)
Board of Education for the City of North York

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